

Elevating Education-System Employee Wellness

May 2026 Wellness Newsletter

Welcome to May's Employee Wellness column, brought to you by ODE's [School Wellness, Inclusion Safety & Health Team](#) (SWISH). It's May and with spring break behind us and summer break is on the horizon- it's the home stretch. May is Mental Health Awareness this month, which started as a campaign in 1949 to reduce stigma and raise awareness of mental health conditions. This work is also known as [Mental Health Literacy](#) and through this work we can align TSEL, health standards and the needs of colleagues and students by deepening our shared understanding of anxiety, depression, stress, and trauma.

This month's column features; Educator appreciation styles as a strategy for improving collective wellbeing, Self-advocacy as a form of Radical Self-Care and an enthusiastic spotlight on wellness work happening in Central Oregon.

For the last three months folks at the Oregon Wellbeing Trust and ODE have been co-facilitating an Educator Workforce Wellness Community of Practice. This month we focused on collective well-being practices. Through the preparation and planning we surfaced the notion that there are institutional ways of supporting collective wellbeing and then there is the organic way that certain colleagues support, care and delight to a job-it makes a difference. [Work appreciation Styles](#) can be: Gifts, Time, Mentorship, Professional Trust and Policy Change. Each of us needs something different to feel supported, seen, and valued. The more leadership and our coworkers know about what lights us up, the better.

Why Self-Advocacy Matters: Speaking up at work can feel hard, especially in education, where responsibility is high, emotions run deep, and the stakes are always framed around students. For many educators, self-advocacy brings stress, fear, or memories of not being heard. If your body reacts before your words do, that's not a personal flaw. It's a sign that advocating within complex systems takes real effort. What's often missing from the conversation is this: educator self-advocacy isn't just about adult well-being. It directly shapes student outcomes. When educators feel able to voice concerns, ask for resources, and challenge practices that aren't working, classrooms function better. Teachers who feel supported and respected are more likely to stay in the profession, build strong relationships with students, and create consistent, engaging learning environments. Students benefit from educators who aren't operating in survival mode but have the capacity to show up fully for learning, connection, and care.

That's where self-efficacy comes in, not just confidence, but the belief that actions can lead to improvement. Administrators play a key role here by fostering strong professional communities, honoring educator expertise, and offering meaningful leadership and learning opportunities. When educators feel skilled, supported, and trusted, advocacy becomes less intimidating and more collaborative. At its core, self-advocacy is about sustainability. When schools invest in conditions that make advocacy possible, everyone benefits. Caring for educators helps students thrive, and that connection is worth taking seriously.

We are so excited to spotlight the work happening through [Central Oregon's Regional Educator Network \(COREN\)](#) as it highlights a [body of work](#) and a collaboration that benefits districts with over 30 different projects! COREN and the Culture of Care initiative at the High Desert ESD are catalyzing this work under Student Success to align resources and support for 985 educators (so far this year!) from Bend-La Pine Schools, Crook County School District, Culver School District, Jefferson County School District 509J, Redmond School District and Sisters School District. [COREN's program overview](#) offers professional learning on a myriad of topics that support individual, collective and systemic wellbeing such as Belonging and Dignity, Collaborative Problem Solving, Restorative Practices and Educator Wellbeing. If you are interested in learning more about virtual wellness coaching for strategies to overcome overwhelm, email amy.yillik@hdesd.org for more information.